

O 292117Z AUG 97  
FM USINT HAVANA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDPGIMMEDIATE 0389  
INFO WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
USIA WASHDC 0218

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 004970

E.O. 12958: DECL: (X6)  
TAGS: PREL PGOV CU  
SUBJECT: CASTRO: STILL NOT DEAD AND LOVING IT

REF: HAVANA 4932

(U) CLASSIFIED BY PRINCIPAL OFFICER MICHAEL G. KOZAK,  
REASONS 1.5 (D).

11. (C) IN AN EFFORT TO DEFINITELY LAY TO REST RECENT  
RUMORS ABOUT THE DEATH OF FIDEL CASTRO, USINT OFFERS SOME  
ITEMS THAT MAY HELP DISPEL THE ALLEGATIONS.

CONG. CAMPBELL: FIDEL CASTRO APPEARED FIT  
-----

12. (C) FIDEL CASTRO WAS PRESENT FOR SOME TWO HOURS AT  
AN AUGUST 29 RECEPTION IN HONOR OF A U.S. GROUP ON A  
PRIVATE TRIP TO CUBA. THE GROUP INCLUDED CONGRESSMEN TOM  
CAMPBELL (R-CA) AND MARSHALL SANFORD (R-SC). CAMPBELL  
MADE A POINT OF DEBRIEFING PRINCIPAL OFFICER THE  
FOLLOWING MORNING. IN DESCRIBING CASTRO S APPEARANCE  
DURING THE RECEPTION, CAMPBELL AND HIS WIFE SAID THEIR  
GENERAL IMPRESSION WAS THAT CASTRO SEEMED TO BE FIT FOR A  
71-YEAR-OLD. CASTRO MOVED AND SPOKE SOMEWHAT CAUTIOUSLY,  
SAID CAMPBELL, BUT NOT UNUSUALLY SO FOR HIS AGE.  
DESCRIBING CASTRO, THE CAMPBELLS USED PHRASES LIKE  
"CASTRO LOOKED TO BE IN GOOD HEALTH FOR A MAN OF HIS  
AGE," "DID NOT HAVE A PAUNCH," "WAS INITIALLY CAUTIOUS IN  
WHAT HE SAID, BUT WARMED UP LATER," "HIS EYES FOCUSED  
WELL," AND "HE DID NOT HAVE A LOT OF ENERGY, BUT MOVED  
AROUND FINE." CAMPBELL NOTED THAT CASTRO STOOD  
THROUGHOUT THE TWO HOURS THAT THEY OBSERVED HIM DURING  
THE RECEPTION AND MENTIONED THAT CASTRO CONFESSED TO  
HAVING GIVEN UP DRINKING AS WELL AS COMMENTING ON THE  
HARMFUL EFFECTS OF SMOKING. THESE COMMENTS OCCURRED IN  
THE COURSE OF A CONVERSATION WITH A U.S. NUTRITIONIST WHO  
WAS PART OF THE SAME GROUP. CASTRO SAID HE HAS ON  
DOCTOR S ADVICE LOST WEIGHT AND EXERCISES "SOME," EATS  
YOGURT AND HAS QUIT DRINKING AS WELL AS SMOKING, AND  
FEELS GOOD. HE DRANK ORANGE JUICE DURING THE RECEPTION.  
CAMPBELL ADDED THAT CASTRO AGREED TO END THE RECEPTION  
WITH A PRAYER. REV. SUAREZ, OF THE CUBAN COUNCIL OF  
CHURCHES AND A MEMBER OF THE CUBAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
(ANPP) BEGAN WITH THE WELL-KNOWN "BLESSED ARE THE  
PEACEMAKERS..." WHICH CASTRO FINISHED FOR HIM "...FOR  
THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD."

13. (C) THE CAMPBELLS SAID THAT CASTRO WAS VERY SERIOUS  
DURING THE CONVERSATION THAT THEY AND OTHER MEMBERS OF  
THEIR GROUP HAD WITH HIM. THE CONVERSATION RANGED  
WIDELY, WITH CASTRO TAKING AN INTEREST IN VIRTUALLY EVERY  
TOPIC. CASTRO SPOKE ABOUT AIDS AND THE HIGH COST OF  
TREATING THE DISEASE; ABOUT THE "EL NINO" WEATHER  
PHENOMENON; WAS ATTENTIVE BUT REMAINED SILENT WHEN THE  
BENEFITS OF ALLOWING ACCESS TO THE INTERNET WERE  
MENTIONED; SPOKE IN PASSING OF THE NEED TO BE VIGILANT  
AGAINST CORRUPTION; AND WAS "EFFUSIVE" IN PRAISING  
EFFORTS BY SOME IN CONGRESS TO EXEMPT FOOD AND MEDICINE  
FROM THE EMBARGO. DURING THE CONVERSATION, CASTRO  
RETURNED A COUPLE OF TIMES TO PRAISING THE CHINESE MODEL  
OF ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH POLITICAL STABILITY AND SEEMED  
UNWILLING TO CRITICIZE CHINA. HE DID CRITICIZE RUSSIA,  
BUT SPOKE IN SOME DEPTH ON THESE MATTERS WITH MRS.  
CAMPBELL WHO RUNS A PROJECT IN RUSSIA PROMOTING FREE-  
MARKET PROCESSES.

14. (C) COMMENT: CONGRESSMAN AND MRS. CAMPBELL S

DESCRIPTION OF CASTRO AT THE AUGUST 28 RECEPTION IS ABOUT AS GOOD A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF CASTRO AND HIS CURRENT STATE OF HEALTH AS ONE COULD HOPE FOR, SHORT OF A DOCTOR S EXAMINATION. EARLIER THAT DAY, A USINT OFFICER SPOTTED CASTRO SITTING IN THE BACK OF HIS OFFICIAL CAR DRIVING ALONG THE MALECON AND CASTRO WAS RELIABLY REPORTED TO HAVE ATTENDED THE RECENT INDONESIAN NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION AFTER THE OTHER GUESTS, INCLUDING PRINCIPAL OFFICER, HAD DEPARTED. CLEARLY, CASTRO IS MOBILE, ALERT AND ALLOWING HIMSELF TO BE SEEN IN PUBLIC, UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL.

15. (C) CONGRESSMAN CAMPBELL HAS NOT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR THE FOREGOING ACCOUNT.

KOZAK